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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [SENV](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: EDO NDDC PROJECTS APPEAR TO BENEFIT
COMMUNITY; NATIONAL PARK OFFERS ECOTOURISM

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11. (SBU) Summary: The Edo State Commissioner for the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) on March 12 showed visiting Nigeria desk officer Andrew Silski four projects around Benin City, including school blocks, road construction, and a solar powered water project. Emboffs were unable to determine the cost of these and other projects or whether these costs are in any way commensurate with the approximately USD 4 million budget Edo State NDDC receives monthly. Deskoff also visited the Okomu National Park in Edo State, which appears to be successfully protecting wildlife and old growth forest; it remains to be seen whether the park will generate employment opportunities for the surrounding communities. End Summary.

Edo NDDC Funds Roads, Schools, Solar Water Projects

12. (U) On March 12, Matthew Iduoriyekemwen, Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) representative for Edo State, gave Nigeria Deskoff and Emboffs a tour of a few of the Commission's projects in and around Benin City, Edo State. Commissioner Iduoriyekemwen explained that Edo is often the smallest oil producer of the nine NDDC states and in 2007 the Edo NDDC office received between USD 3.8 and 4.2 million per month from the Federal Government. (Note: The reduction in revenue is likely due in part to militant attacks on pipelines in Delta State that cut off Edo's oilfields and to territorial disputes over production sites near Delta State. End Note.) Therefore, Iduoriyekemwen said, the NDDC typically funds projects under USD 17 million in areas where population needs are great, such as the capitol (Benin City) and where communities lobby for particular projects. Deskoff saw two road construction projects, six new school blocks, and a soon to be finished 20,000 gallon solar powered water project in a rural area.

¶3. (SBU) Discussing government's relationship with the NDDC, Iduoriyekemwen said Edo State Governor Oserheimen Osunbor works with the NDDC to avoid duplicating projects. The Federal Government does not make its required contribution to the NDDC on a timely basis, Iduoriyekemwen said, but the international oil companies can be relied upon to pay their shares on time. Emboffs noted that the main street in Benin City was in need of repair; Iduoriyekemwen said it was a federal road and therefore outside the NDDC's purview.

¶4. (SBU) Describing project proposal solicitation, Iduoriyekemwen said small projects are publicly advertised at the NDDC office in Benin City while large projects are published in nationwide media sources. Interested contractors reportedly undergo a prequalification assessment to determine their competence. The NDDC then considers the most realistic bids, which are not always the cheapest, he noted, and in-house engineers offer their analysis and recommend which bid to award.

Ecotourism Opportunities at Nigerian National Park

¶5. (U) Deskoff toured the Okomu National Park and Ecoresort in Edo State on March 13. Okomu, located on the border of Nigeria's south-south and south-west regions (between Edo and Ondo states), is home to one of Nigeria's two rainforests and boasts a diverse range of wildlife. In addition to the rarely seen monkeys, chimpanzees, forest elephants and forest buffalo, the park is reportedly home to over 200 species of birds and over 700 species of butterflies. Deskoff saw numerous butterflies and birds during this excursion, as well as recent evidence suggesting elephants were in the vicinity.

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¶6. (U) The Park also offers an Ecoresort which is capable of lodging 24 visitors (12 rooms offering two twin beds) in the heart of the forest. The facilities appeared new and in excellent physical condition. According to the tour guide, over 20 guests each month visit Okomu.

¶7. (U) Yakubu Kolo, Director of the Park, told Deskoff that his office meets nearby communities on a weekly basis to discuss the importance of the park and its biodiversity of flora and fauna. Kolo said community members help park rangers monitor the park's perimeters for poachers and illegal loggers. Illegal logging is reportedly a great threat to the park's old growth trees, some of which reach a circumference of over 20 feet.

¶8. (SBU) Comment: The road and school projects we saw in Edo state appeared to be well-used and in strategic locations (there were hundreds of children at the school and much traffic on the completed roads). The rural water project was located near a village but in an area which seemed to be slated for upscale housing. While Emboffs were happy to have the chance to view these apparently successful projects, we had no way to gauge the cost of these and other NDDC projects, nor to determine whether those costs are in any way commensurate with the approximately USD 4 million budget Edo NDDC receives monthly. Nor could we assess whether other criticisms levied at the NDDC, such as lack of transparency in its procurement processes, were valid.

¶9. (SBU) The Okomu National Park is clearly one of Nigeria's ecological gems offering at least temporary protection for species threatened by the poverty of the human inhabitants of the surrounding area. Emboffs were unable to observe whether the park will offer employment or other development opportunities to the surrounding community. End Comment.

¶10. (U) This cable was cleared by Deskoff and Embassy Abuja.
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